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DE RUEHSJ #0438/01 1441714
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 231714Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9760
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SAN JOSE 000438

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/PD AND WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ETRD ETTC PREL CS

SUBJECT: COSTA RICA: TITLE III SUSPENSION OF THE LIBERTAD ACT

REF: A. STATE 52541
1B. 07 SAN JOSE 1061

¶1. Costa Rican President Oscar Arias remains one of the region's leading critics of the Castro government and a strong advocate for democratic change and human rights reforms in Cuba. Costa Rica shows no signs that it would consider re-establishing diplomatic relations with the Castro government, which were severed in 1961. The USG should encourage and bolster Costa Rica's continued support for democracy in Cuba. Suspending Title III of the Libertad Act in regard to Costa Rica remains in the USG national interest.

¶2. Costa Rica's pointed criticism of the Cuban administration has continued throughout the past six months. President Arias has publicly stated that "a substantial change" in Cuba is not possible until Fidel Castro's death. He has also characterized the changes in Cuba since the transition of power to Raul Castro as merely "cosmetic." President Arias' public statements are consistent with his long history of support for democratic change and human rights reforms in Cuba.

¶3. The following responses are keyed to Ref A questions:

A) Costa Rica continues to be one of the region's leading critics of the Castro government and a strong advocate for democratic change and human rights reforms in Cuba. For instance, on May 20, 2008, the Costa Rican Committee for Solidarity with Democracy in Cuba and the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba hosted a forum on Cuba. Participants included a former ex-president of Costa Rica, a current Costa Rican deputy, an ex-deputy, a Czech diplomat in Costa Rica, and a former Cuban political prisoner.

The May 20, 2008 forum highlighted Costa Rica's commitment to freedom and democracy and its criticism of Cuba's abysmal record on human rights. Luis Alberto Monge Alvarez, President of Costa Rica from 1982 to 1986 and a member of President Arias' National Liberation Party (PLN), spoke of "communist occupation" in Cuba. He referred to the "communist dictatorship" of the Castro regime while expressing Costa Rica's solidarity with the Cuban people.

Deputy Jose Manuel Echandi mentioned that the small group of protesters assembled outside of the forum venue would have been imprisoned in Cuba for publicly expressing their dissenting opinions. Ivan Dubovicky, a Czech diplomat in Costa Rica, commented that Cuba's repression of its people is similar to the situation in Czechoslovakia prior to 1989. Ernesto Diaz Rodriguez, a former Cuban political prisoner, spoke of his own personal experience of hardship under the Castro regime.

The May 20, 2008 forum was a good example of Costa Rica's strong commitment to democracy and human rights in Cuba. This commitment extends broadly across the various Costa

Rican political parties.

B) The Costa Rican government has continued to make public statements in support of democracy in Cuba. On February 19, 2008, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement in which it reaffirmed Costa Rica's "support for the democratic desire of the Cuban people." Recent public statements by President Arias also support genuine democratic change in Cuba (see paragraph 2).

C) Post is not aware of any high-level diplomatic visits between Cuba and Costa Rica in the past six months.

D) Post is not aware of any Costa Rican business investments in Cuba.

E) Post is not aware of any bilateral trade agreements between Costa Rica and Cuba.

F) Post is not aware of any exchange programs between Costa Rica and Cuba. A limited number of Costa Rican students have accepted scholarships to study medicine and film in Cuba, but Post is not aware of any formal exchange or scholarship programs between Cuban and Costa Rican universities. Post is unaware of any Costa Ricans who have traveled to Cuba for medical treatment, given the availability of publicly subsidized health care in Costa Rica. Post estimates that there are roughly hundreds of Cuban doctors working in Costa Rica, either in private practices or with Costa Rican hospitals. For example, some provide radiological treatment at Hospital Mexico in San Jose. Many of these doctors fled Cuba for greater political and economic freedom in Costa Rica. Many of these doctors eventually naturalize as Costa

Rican citizens.

BRENNAN